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East Timor: It's time to talk

British Coalition for East Timor

Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor provokes a storm

Plans to hold a conference on East Timor in the Philippines have created an unexpected controversy, and resulted, ultimately, in considerable embarrassment for the Indonesian and Philippine governments and unexpected media attention for East Timor.

The Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor — the first conference on East Timor to be held in the region — was planned for late May and early June, organised by a coalition of Philippine activists and international NGOs. Some 200 people, including religious leaders, important scholars, Indonesian dissidents, and at least one Nobel Prize winner, Mairead Maguire, were to attend.

But shortly before the conference was to take place, the Indonesian government began making more and more vocal protests, finally pressuring and threatening the Philippine government into taking action against it.

First Philippine President Ramos announced a ban on foreigners coming to participate in the conference. Solidarity groups also obtained information about a blacklist of specific people, initially a list of twelve (including Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong of TAPOL, also members of BCET) but increasingly steadily, and probably drawn up by Indonesian intelligence.

Then on May 27, a Philippine judge issued a restraining order against the conference as a whole. Though this order was quickly overturned by the Supreme Court, on May 28 Mairead Maguire, and Tom Hyland of the East Timor Irish Solidarity Campaign arrived at the airport in Manila, and were immediately deported back to Ireland.

This attempt to stifle discussion of East Timor has backfired, however. Philippine activists and others are furious that their government has caved in to Indonesian threats. Statements of protest have poured in from around the world. On May 30, Danielle Mitterand, wife of French President Francois Mitterand, held a press conference to denounce the ban (Mme Mitterand had initially planned to attend the conference).

In Ireland, Maguire and Hyland were met at the airport by the Lord Mayor of Dublin and representatives of several political parties and were asked to give a briefing to the Foreign Office. This incident may well confirm the Irish government in its increasingly strong stand on East Timor.

The conference, and the ban on foreigners, has featured prominently in the international media, including CNN. Overwhelmingly, the coverage has been favourable towards East Timor.

At least 25 international solidarity activists did succeed in entering Manila in defiance of the ban, and were escorted into the conference site by a human circle of several hundred Filipino participants.

Though arrest and deportation warrants were issued against ten who spoke at a press conference, and subsequently against ten others, no action has been taken directly against them as we go to press.

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This is the first regular issue of the newsletter of the British Coalition for East Timor, which we plan to publish every two months. There is no charge to receive the newsletter, but we if you can make a £10 donation it will help our work, and allow us to mail to all our supporters. Send to British Coalition for East Timor, Box 2349, London E1 3HX

The British Coalition for East Timor also administers the Timor Relief Fund, a fund for the assistance and relief of victims of violence in East Timor. The Fund's current program focusses on assistance to Timorese youth and to political prisoners and their families.

By the very nature of the regime of surveillance under which most Timorese live, much of this funding has to be channelled by confidential means and we are not at liberty to reveal too many details. However, a representative of the Fund visits Indonesia or East Timor at least once a year to make contact with the small groups we support. Assistance from the Fund is used for peaceful purposes and directed towards not only supporting victims, but helping them build up infrastructures.

You can make a donation by sending a cheque made out to the Timor Relief Fund to Box 2349, London E1 3HX. The Fund is not yet a formal charity, though we hope to become one as soon as possible.

SOME RECENT EVENTS

February: First oil find made in the Timor Gap, by a New Zealand based drilling company.
February 14-18: Nine foreign journalists are allowed to make a tightly controlled visit to East Timor. Prisoners in the Becora Jail shout independence slogans within the journalists' hearing. Bishop Belo refuses to speak to them, feeling this would be playing into the Indonesian government's hand; instead, the journalists meet with Marcus Wanandi, a Chinese-Indonesian priest with close ties to Suharto's family, who is presented as a spokesman for the Timorese church.
February 17: The Jakarta-based Legal Aid Institute (LBH) is denied permission to visit Xanana in prison, despite his explicit request that they serve as his legal representatives.
February 18: Fr. Dominggos Soares, a Timorese priest outspoken in his support of the resistance, is summoned for interrogation at army headquarters. Thanks in part to a quick international response, the interrogation is brief and there is no torture.
February 21: Bishop Hilton Deakin, auxiliary bishop of Melbourne, Australia, reveals evidence that a Timorese man was tortured for three days in order to force him to falsely implicate the Timorese Catholic Church in "subversive activities".
March 5: The United Nations Human Rights Commission passes a "consensus declaration" on East Timor, expressing concern at the number of people still not accounted for after the Santa Cruz massacre of November 1991 and urging greater access for humanitarian organisations. A visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Execution is set for June 1994. Lobbying by the British government is partly responsible for the relative weakness of the statement compared to the resolution of the previous year.
March 20: LBH lawyers are finally permitted to visit Xanana, who has filed for a retrial.
March 22-April 12: 25 Timorese living in Portugal make a visit to Indonesia and East Timor, a trip bankrolled by Suharto's daughter Tutut. They are closely supervised by security officers; the visit is widely condemned as a propaganda initiative.
March 24: Hooligans attack the house of George Aditjondro, an Indonesian academic who has openly criticised the occupation of East Timor.
March 29: Two of Aditjondro's colleagues who have spoken out to support him are threatened with dismissal.
March 30: Dick Spring, Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, announces that he supports economic sanctions against Indonesia because of "serious abuses of human rights" in East Timor.
April 11: Xanana releases a letter saying that he is being threatened and appealing to international humanitarian organisations for protection and for transfer to another cell block.
April 13-20: During a supervised visit by 25 foreign journalists, young Timorese stage two small protests in Dili, and political prisoners in the Becora Jail succeed in shouting out some information about their conditions, including incidents of torture. The protests receive wide media coverage. All five porotestors are later arrested.
April 26: About 150 people protest outside the British Aerospace AGM in London, demanding an end to arms sales to Indonesia. Inside the meeting, some 20 small shareholders raise questions concerning East Timor.
April 27: Indonesian and US navy ships take part in a joint naval exercise.
May 1-3: 10 members of the Timorese student resistance are arrested in Dili, apparently because they were planning a demonstration. Reports say some or all are still detained and are being tortured.
May 5: 51 out of 99 MPs in New Zealand sign a petition expressing concern over the situation in East Timor.
May 5-6: Another round of UN sponsored talks on East Timor between Indonesia and Portugal held in Geneva.
May 20: A Timorese student activist in Indonesia is arrested trying to mail a letter from Konis Santana to the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor.
May 27: Under pressure from Indonesia, the Philippine government bans the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor. Foreigners coming to participate, including Nobel prize winner Mairead Maguire, are deported.

Mass Action to Stop the Hawks

July 8-11: Walk from British Aerospace factory in Farnborough, to their headquarters in London.
July 11: Rally at BAe HQ at 11 a.m., march to Ministry of Defense. There will be a die-in for those wishing to take part in civil disobedience. Others will decorate the fence around the Ministry and hand out leaflets
Training day July 2, 11 am-5 pm, 162 Holloway Rd, London N7
Supported by AFRI, ARROW, BAe Campaign, British Coalition for East Timor, Campaign Against Arms Trade, East Timor Irish Solidarity Campaign, Pax Christi, TAPOL
For more info, or to make a donation towards costs: No Hawks to Indonesia, c/o NVRN, 162 Holloway Rd, London N7

Women on the Road for Peace
protest at BAe Farnborough
August 5-6.
For more infomation contact Women on the Road for Peace, 15 Greenheyes Rd, Toxteth, Liverpool, L8 0SX, 051-727-6025

The Foreign Office replies — sort of

Since the screening of John Pilger's Death of a Nation, thousands of people have written to their MPs, the Foreign Office, the Defense Export Services Organisation and the Prime Minister, to express concern about East Timor and, in particular, the protest the sale of British Hawk jets. The form-letter responses generated by the Foreign Office (who seem to be answering all correspondence, regardless of who it is sent to) have some remarkable similarities to the public relations statements coming out of the Indonesian Embassy, and demonstrate once again the Foreign Office's close relationship with Indonesia, and its very hazy relationship with the truth.

Here are only a few of the most outstanding distortions:

• *There is no "reliable evidence" that 200,000 people have died as a result of the invasion.*

This is a line of propaganda being pushed heavily by Jakarta at the moment. While it is true that restricted access and Indonesian government distortions make it impossible to come to a precise figure, the estimate of 200,000 is acknowledged to be a *minimum* number of casualties by most researchers, including Indonesian scholar George Aditjondro, including the Catholic Church, and including Amnesty International. The figure has even been confirmed by the puppet governor of East Timor, Abilio Osorio Soares, who recently told journalists that he thought 200,000 casualties was a roughly correct estimate.

• *There is no reliable evidence that survivors of the Santa Cruz massacre were killed in hospital.*

In fact, human rights groups received reports of this second massacre within days of the event; only now have a few of the eyewitnesses been able to speak publicly, as they did at the United Nations Human Rights Commission last month. Bishop Belo has told of specific young men he accompanied to hospital who then "disappeared." The Foreign Office quotes a "prominent Catholic priest" who denies the accounts — this priest is Marcus Wanandi, a Chinese-Indonesian with extremely close ties to Suharto's family.

• *The human rights situation in East Timor is "improving"*

Arbitrary arrest, detention and torture are commonplace in East Timor. The population lives under constant surveillance and in a permanent state of fear. There are frequent reports of the rape of Timorese women by Indonesian troops, and constant 'disappearances'; hundreds of political prisoners are held in jails in East Timor and in Indonesia, often being tortured. The Santa Cruz massacre was simply "business as usual", the only difference being that for once it was filmed.

• *The British Hawks were sold to Indonesia "too late" to be used in East Timor*

The Foreign Office would like to maintain that air attacks on the Timorese ceased shortly after 1975 (before the Hawks were purchased). This is not the case, and there are many survivors of air attacks in the early and mid 1980s who can testify otherwise. Konis Santana, the current leader of the guerrilla resistance, has testified that air attacks, using Hawks, are still going on. The Foreign Office makes the extraordinary statement that "Hawks were not used at the Santa Cruz cemetery in November 1991" as if this demonstrated anything whatsoever except their own ingenuous distortions of the truth.

It should also be kept in mind that Indonesia has no hostile neighbours. Their considerable purchases of military equipment can only be meant for internal use, probably in East Timor and in Aceh.

This is just a small sample of the disinformation currently being put out by the Foreign Office. Please send us copies of any letters you receive from the British Government, and ask us for information about how to respond if you are unsure.

Aid for murder: Britain, Indonesia and ATP

The recent Pergau Dam scandal has served to focus attention on Britain's "aid for trade" policy. "Aid for trade" is very much a factor in Britain's dealings with Indonesia, as well as Malaysia and elsewhere; and that "trade" is often enough military.

TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign presented a brief to the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee which was investigating Pergau and the Aid and Trade Provision (ATP). The brief pointed out that it was just after an aid agreement for £65m, for a power plant in East Kalimantan, was signed by Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd last spring, that Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind finalised arrangements for the UK's largest arms deal ever with Indonesia — the £500m sale of 24 Hawk fighter/trainer aircraft, plus technology transfer and training.

The power plant itself will serve a region where coal and gold mining has rapidly grown in the past few years. The mines are owned by British Petroleum and the Australia-based mining company CRA, in which London-based RTZ has a controlling interest. The mines are seriously damaging the livelihoods of tribal people.

TAPOL also pointed out that Dr B.J Habibie, who presides over all of Indonesia's war-equipment manufacturers, has particularly close business ties with British Aerospace. His brother, J.E. Habibie, is now the Indonesian ambassador to London.

The World Development Movement, in their submission, noted that the British firm Marconi has supplied Indonesia with £27m in shortwave radio transmitters under the ATP, and has also provided a complete communications system for the Indonesian military. This seems unlikely to be coincidental.

TAPOL has compiled details on a series of visits by British officials to Indonesia, with a pattern of ever-increasing levels of "tied aid" and ever-increasing trade links between Britain and Indonesia, in which the Hawk deal plays a large role.

Also of interest is a recent report from the Project on Demilitarisation and Democracy, which concludes that World Bank (and, one may add, most other) loans to Indonesia simply cannot help but fall into the hands of the military, which largely controls the society.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. There has been a wave of arrests of members of the unarmed student resistance, both in East Timor and in Indonesia. These young men are almost certainly being tortured in custody. Write expressing concern for the five young men arrested in Dili after their demonstration in April (Lucas Santos and four others); for the ten students arrested in Dili in early May (Nuno de Andrade Sarmento Carvelho, Pedro Fatima Tilman, Lucas Tilman dos Santos, Rui Fernandes, Anibal, Octaviano, Pantaleao, Miguel, Rosalino, and Marcos); and for José Antonio Neves, arrested for trying to mail a letter to the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor, on May 20. Send letters to **Minister of Justice Haji Utoyo Usman S.H., Menteri Kehakiman, Jl. Rasuna Said Kav. 6-7, Kuningan, Jakarta Selatan, Indonesia**, and **Brigadier-General R. Adang Ruchiatna, Pangdam IX/Udayana, Markas Besar KODAM IX Udayana, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia.** Also write to **J.E. Habibie, Embassy of Indonesia, 38 Grosvenor Square, London W1X 9AS.**
2. Keep up the pressure against the Hawk sales. Keep writing to your MP and taking part in protets (see p. 2)
3. This is the time when people are planning their summer vacations. Organise leafletting outside travel agencies, letting people know what kind of goverment they are supporting by taking holidays in Indonesia. Contact the Coalition for information or copies of our general leaflet.
4. Subscribe to **TAPOL Bulletin**, 111 Northwood Rd, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR7 8HW (£14/year for individuals, £20 for institutions) and **Timor Link**, c/o East Timor Project, CIIR, Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190A New North Rd, London N1 7BJ (£10/year for individuals, £20 for institutions) for more detailed information on Indonesia and East Timor.
5. Support our work financially. This newsletter is mailed to all our supporters, but it costs money to produce. We need funds to print information and resource materials, to organise campaigns, to send representatives to important events, and to continue to employ a part-time worker.

I enclose a donation of ____ £10 ____ £20 ____ £50 _____ other

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Anyone making out a standing order of £15/year or more will receive a free copy of Hugh O'Shaughnessy's new book, *East Timor: Getting Away With Murder?*

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